

New York Theatre Critics' Reviews 1956

The next scheduled theatre opening in New York is in September; issue containing complete reviews will be mailed as usual the following week.

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Rachel W. Coffin, Editor

Week of June 18, 1956

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NEW YORK JOURNAL-AMERICAN
NEW YORK DAILY NEWS
NEW YORK POST

NEW YORK MIRROR

NEW YORK WORLD TELEGRAM & THE SUN
NEW YORK HERALD TRIBUNE
NEW YORK TIMES

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"New Faces of '56"

The New York Times

June 15, 1956

Theatre: 'New Faces'

Sillman's Latest Revue
Opens at Barrymore

By BROOKS ATKINSON

SINCE they are new faces in "New Faces of '56," which opened at the Ethel Barrymore last evening, they are not old pros. And that may be the reason their show just misses the final excitement of a first-rate musical revue.

But their professional competency stands at a uniformly high level. None of them is an amateur and none of the show is catch-can. Leonard Sillman has searched them out in every village and farm in the universe, and they are fresh, attractive, gay and polished.

T. C. Jones is a swagger, bass parody of darling Tallulah; he introduces several of the numbers with a bravado that is amusingly familiar. Billie Hayes, platinum-hued on top, is a breezy mountebank

who does not waste a gesture or a grimace.

Among the performers every one is either winning or able or both: Jane Connell, who can drink a glass of water and sing at the same time; Dana Sosa, who knows the style of the French ballad; Inga Swenson, who has an agreeable singing voice; John Reardon, who is an accomplished romantic baritone; Tiger Haynes and Ann Henry, who know how to relax into the mood of a blues; Virginia Martin, who can caricature the cultural life of the nation's Marilyn; Johnny Haymer, a first-rate leading man.

Thanks to Peter Larkin, scene designer, Thomas Becker, the thread-and-needle man, and Peggy Clark, the lighting expert, "New Faces of '56" is a handsome show in the best tradition of Broadway. Mr. Larkin has invented a number of ways to keep the décor

light, brisk and modern. Depending more on brains than material, he has given the stage the aura of a lively and tasteful occasion.

Granted all the talent and all the incidental accomplishments, "New Faces of '56" lacks that ultimate wit and variety that make really entertaining shows. In Broadway's most pregnant phrase, the entire production has been "conceived" by Mr. Sillman in a conventional way. Songs, costume spectacles, burlesques, dance turns—the familiar revue formula.

With no more material to work on, the old pros can provide strength or a wealth of humor that conquer audiences; and those are the qualities that make the stars. By confining his attention to new faces, Mr. Sillman has to dispense with the insurance of stars. He tries to make his stars as he goes along.

But it seemed to one playgoer last evening that "New Faces of '56" needed the brilliance of a great performer to lift it above the dead level of general competence. Everything is pleasant. But nothing is electric or memorable. The new faces would make the most beguiling background for

"NEW FACES OF '56"

Musical revue with music and lyrics mostly by June Carroll, Arthur Siegel, Marshall Barer, Dean Fuller, Murray Grand, Matt Dubey, Harold Karr, Irvin Graham, Ronny Graham, Paul Nassau, John Rox and Michael Brown; sketches mostly by Paul Lynde, Richard Maury and Louis Botto; entire production conceived and supervised by Leonard Sillman; musical numbers staged and directed by David Tihmar; assisted by Peter Conlow; sketches directed by Mr. Lynde; settings by Peter Larkin; costumes by Thomas Becher; lighting by Peggy Clark; presented by Mr. Sillman and John Roberts in association with Yvette Schumer at the Ethel Barrymore Theatre, June 15, 1956 with the following featured in the cast: Franca Baldwin, Suzanne Bernard, Jane Connell, Billie Hayes, Johnny Haymer, Tiger Haynes, Ann Henry, T. C. Jones, Johnny Laverty, Virginia Martin, Bill McCutcheon, John Reardon, Amru Sani, Bob Shaver, Jimmy Sisco, Maggie Smith, Dana Sosa, Rod Strong, and Inga Swenson.

one old face capable of lighting up a modish revue.



New York World-Telegram

and
The Sun

June 15, 1956

Whole Bunch of 'New Faces' Arrives on Our Broadway

By WILLIAM HAWKINS.

If the cast of Leonard Sillman's "New Faces" could do what it did last night in all that heat, there is no telling what it will do on a normal evening.

The show has a fine balance between eagerness and professional control. It is speedy and terrifically funny and mighty nice to look at.

Much of its novelty lies in the fresh personalities of the people who are playing the revue. But there is one item of really unusual interest, the presence of a first-rate female impersonator.

Company's Loaded.

This sort of revue art has

disappeared in recent years. With the local introduction of T. C. Jones it once more becomes tasteful and hilarious. For Jones works with subtlety and a peculiarly ingenious humor.

He does the best impersonations that have been seen here since Florence Desmond's, and he can create characters, and star in spectacular productions with as much aplomb and daring as Bankhead.

But the company is loaded. There is a girl named Billie Hayes, diminutive and snow-haired, who sings with crazy authority, and dances like a jumping jack, who stopped the show last night.

More Fun.

Then there is a pale and reddish-haired dame, Virginia Martin by name, who does a fabulous and absurd satire on studio acting, then turns out to sing both sweet and uproarious as the mood claims her.

Jane Connell can similarly turn herself into various assorted moods and people, ancient TV contestant or heroine of African films, all with the greatest of ease.

One of the show's great moments, and certainly one of the funniest things in our theater, is Maggie Smith's descent of a staircase as a Follies Girl draped in thousands of oranges. Miss Smith

is chic as the sleek sketch heroines, too.

Amru Sani, impressive looking, sings with fire and humor.

And Still More.

Then there is Inga Swenson, a blonde doll with a sweet voice. Ann Henry has a contagious way with a song, and Franca Baldwin is particularly striking in the dance to "White Witch."

Suzanne Bernard is a vivid little French number, and Dana Sosa adds decorative quality to the dances.

Johnny Haymer is a repeated ring leader of the gentlemen's contingent and sings one of the show's catchiest items, "What Does That Dream Mean?"

The maniacally comic Tiger Haynes gives the audience a fine time with his song about the Washingtons. And there are several other personable, talented young men who move in and out so fast it is all but impossible to identify them.

Peter Larkin has designed original and flashing decors, and David Tihmar has assisted the producers in getting the show to run like a highly elated Superchief.

Journal  American

June 15, 1956

Lots of Zest Plus Talent

But Sillman's New Revue Fails To Find Fresh Comedy Writers

By JOHN McCLAIN

THE SINGLE HERO of this Broadway week seems to be Peter Larkin, the scenic designer. Wednesday night he emerged with most of the raves for "Shangri-La," the big, beautiful and often boring musical at the Winter Garden; last night he dominated a revue called "New Faces of '56," presented by Leonard Sillman, at the Ethel Barrymore.

For once again, it seemed to me, the auspices far outshone the material. It is no news to anybody that the revue is a tough show biz medium; truly hilarious sketches are as hard to come by as a pair for "Fair Lady";

pop songs and haunting ballads are equally rare, and granted you acquire all this there's a little matter of casting, tempo, and all the other intangibles that keep the customers jumping in their seats.

Sillman succeeded wonderfully well with some of these factors. Larkin created for him an ingenious, brilliant series of sets and curtains which run and fall all evening without impeding the action, yet adding immeasurably to the sense of unpretentious elegance.

Lots of Zest

He brags about his "New Faces", and he's got some good ones; he has also found a few fetching tunes, and he has certainly inspired his people with enormous zest.

But he's failed to find any notably new or memorable comedy writers.

In his roster of fresh talent he has a real giant in the form of a character called T. C. Jones, a female impersonator. This Navy veteran and father opens the show with a shattering impression of Tallulah Bankhead and continues to score heavily at intervals, closing the proceedings with a marvelous take-off of a non-talented glamor girl in a night club act.

He has other commend-

able discoveries in Maggie Smith, Bob Shaver, Johnny Haymer, Bill McCutcheon, Amru Sani, Inga Swenson, Suzanne Bernard, Franca Baldwin, and particularly Jane Connell.

Miss Connell carries the ball throughout the evening and exhibits a fine, impish comedy sense and an ability to sing and dance creditably.

Amru Sani, a highly decorative Indian young lady, has a couple of feature numbers which promise her a bright future in the sophisticated song field.

Ann Henry and Tiger Haynes stopped the festivities with a lazy Southern bit, quite a haunting little song called, "Scratch My Back."

There are other pleasant tunes, some very agreeable dancing, and a few acceptable sketches. But there aren't enough, I'm afraid, to make this a winner. Maybe Sillman would be better advised to forget the faces and just look for "New Writers of '57."

DAILY  NEWS

June 15, 1956

'New Faces of '56' Zippy, Cheery, Tuneful, Youthful and Intelligent

By JOHN CHAPMAN

With a little bit of this, with a little bit of that . . . and pretty soon you have a cheerful revue by and with a number of nice young people, Leonard Sillman's "New Faces of '56." It opened last evening at the Barrymore Theatre, and it's just what this town can use all summer.

Not everything in it is first chop, but it runs long anyhow and trimming will improve it. One or two sketches can be abandoned—first to go should be a satire on Japanese movies—and one or two songs can be cut in half, and then everything will be slick and intimate. And I wouldn't get rid of any one of the 19 members of the company, for they all make excellent contributions in sketch, song or dance.

As master of ceremonies we have T. C. Jones, doing an astonishingly skillful impersonation of Tallulah Bankhead. His take-

off has sharp wit. After a so-so opening number about the United Nations, the revue gets moving with a bouncy song for several of the company, "What Does That Dream Mean?" Next comes a really funny burlesque of a talent scout show on TV, and here I particularly recommend Dana Sosa's gargling of "Rose O'Day" with her head tipped back and her throat full of water. (As a matter of fact, Sillman seems to be a better scout than Godfrey all along the line).

Kidding "Hatful"

Next there is a song tableau—

a dinner table set in a picture frame—which is one of designer Peter Larkin's cleverest conceits. After a while is a good topical satire on "A Hatful of Rain" called "A Canful of Trash," in which Bill McCutcheon portrays a hopeless addict and Virginia Martin is a lot like Shelley Winters as his wife. (This addict's affliction is that he is a litterbug.)

And along comes June Carroll, driving a team of cardboard huskies and chanting about "April in Fairbanks." Soon there is Ann Henry doing a hilarious number, "And He Flipped." One of the two best songs is "I Could Love Him," as sung by Billie Hayes, and one of the several best sketches is a takeoff on a jungle movie, "Steady Edna."

Funny Finale

The first-act finale is just as gorgeous as any of those staircase numbers that Ziegfeld,

White and Carroll used to do, and ten times as funny. You must see the show girls—Miss Birdcage, Miss Orange and Miss Hat—try to get down that pesky staircase, and watch the pony ballet wearing pony tails where tails ought to be.

Another good satire is "Twenty Years in the Blackboard Jungle," in which Billie Hayes undertakes to teach at a school for delinquent children. She figures that her job is to teach them how to be delinquents; in her book, the three R's are robbery, ransom and rape.

Perhaps the most beguiling song of all is "Scratch My Back," sung by Ann Henry and Tiger Haynes, and another admirable single number is Virginia Martin's "Talent." And, skipping around in my program, I note that I've put a check-mark—which means okay—on a very British triangle comedy, "Darts," played by Bill McCutcheon, Maggie Smith and John Reardon.

So many have had a hand in writing the show that they all can't be mentioned this time and in this space—but, like the cast, they are mostly newcomers. One sure old hand is Peter Larkin, the young man who did the sets. These in their grace, humor, effectiveness and workability, are a revue all by themselves.

"New Faces of '56"—continued

Daily Mirror

June 15, 1956

Robert Coleman's THEATRE:

'New Faces of '56' Furiously Funny Hit

• T. C. Jones and Franca Baldwin
are standouts at Barrymore.

A swell antidote for the heat and humidity arrived at the Ethel Barrymore Theatre Thursday evening: Leonard Sillman's "New Faces of '56." It's a furiously fast and funny revue that had the first-nighters blistering their palms in approval. There were rousing salutes for all 19 of the gifted personalities in the cast.

As usual, Sillman has come up with another batch of future stars: dancers, singers and comics. They all know their way around a stage. They know just how to

use a slapstick to kid the pants off of "The Blackboard Jungle," the U. N. TV amateur hours, melodramas about dope pushers and lavish revues.

THE LAST PROVED a riot of hilarity with deadpan showgirls struggling up and down steps, draped in oranges, birdcages and whatever, topped by huge, unwieldy picture hats. Another laugh wow was a Japanese impression of American horse operas.

The standout of the current "New Faces," in our book, is T. C. Jones, a wonderfully accurate female impersonator. His take-offs of Tallulah, Bette Davis and Katherine Hepburn were real masterpieces of characterization.

Other show-stoppers were Franca Baldwin, Suzanne Bernard, Jane Connell, Billie Hayes, Johnny Haymer, Tiger Haynes, Ann Henry, Johnny Lavery, Virginia Martin, Bill McCutcheon, John Reardon, Amru Sani, Bob Shaver, Jimmy Sisco, Maggie Smith, Dana Sosa, Red Strong and Inga Swenson.

MISS BALDWIN, a pert, pretty and dynamic blonde step-

per, was particularly intriguing in an eerie Jamaican calypso number.

Director Paul Lynde and choreographer David Thimar have paced the new arrival at super-sonic speed. And Peter Larkin has devised another of his ingenious productions. Jay Blackton batonned the orchestra most effectively.

"New Faces of '56" is a clever, tuneful and amusing romp. Sillman spent three years in cities throughout the country, auditioning material and talent for the show, and he came up with a revue champ.

Patience and perseverance will pay off in a big way for him. He'll only be one of the Internal Revenue Department's favorite people.

If you don't mind wrecking your ribs, "New Faces of '56" is your dish. A solid sender. It's easy to forget the heat in the air-conditioned Ethel Barrymore.

NEW YORK Herald Tribune

June 15, 1956

THEATER

'New Faces of '56'

By WALTER F. KERR

QUITE early in the new "New Faces" there's one of those picture-frame numbers, in which a resplendent lady stands at the head of an insanely tilting table surveying the perfect world that is hers. First thing you know, though, things are slipping away on her: the wineglass out of her hand, the food right off the table, the musician at her elbow smack through the floor.

On the whole, I felt more or less as the lady did about Leonard Sillman's entry for 1956. The world that surrounds some eighteen or nineteen smiling young performers is just about perfect. Designer Peter Larkin has shown his hand—and handsomely—with the first few bars of the overture: instead of patiently looking at a lowered curtain while the orchestra warms up, we are entertained instead by a series of flowing tapestries and flying figurines, with three wonderfully spiraling stairways shooting into the air behind them.

Thereafter there is a constant pictorial magic, modest in its dimensions but engagingly tricky as it flows blithely by: blue-crystal doll houses, jungle huts breaking wildly away in the high tropical winds, Paris bars and Jamaican mansions and gaudy large-scale diplomas on graduation day. Thomas Becher's costumes flash and flare against the gliding backgrounds, while Peggy Clark's lighting—managed with the light-battens in full view all evening—is endlessly dazzling.

And the bright, breezy, emphatically commanding company that inhabits so much casual splendor has a perfect right to be confident. They're authentic professionals, every last one of them. I never really expected to be regaled by a first-rate female impersonator again in my time, but a fellow named T. C. Jones has caught the precise mesh of Tallulah

Bankhead's teeth, tongue and collapsible cheeks, and the results are spectacularly funny. Mr. Jones' way with a wig and an oversize cape is no mere stunt, by the way: he has a precise sense of caricature and a genuine inventiveness beneath the borrowed mascara.

There are other enormously secure vaudevillians. Billie Hayes, for instance, is a diminutive powerhouse with a sort of platinum blonde crew-cut—it makes her look rather like a delinquent Grandma Moses—and when she puts some jittery footwork under a very fast lyric ("I Could Love Him"), or when she briskly dusts herself off after an exhausting fling around the stage, she has the uninhibited freshness of a real find.

Jane Connell, another blonde with a bulldog enthusiasm, is sometimes forced to bash away at her material to make it stand up and fight. But I'd say she has the stamina to do it: as you watch her mush across the stage after a dog-sled in order to get into an exceptionally chilly love song ("April in Fairbanks") or bounce about in terror as the exceptionally pregnant heroine of a jungle melodrama, you know that a skilled comedienne is just waiting for a few blockbuster lines.

Virginia Martin may have the loudest voice yet heard outside a ballpark, and she makes a jest called "Talent" seem winning indeed. Suzanne Bernard is a lovely gamine in a sidewalk cafe bit, and John Reardon, Johnny Haymer, Jimmy Sisco, and Ann Henry are a few of the others who asserted their coming-of-age last evening.

If things do seem to slip away before "New Faces" is done with its cavorting, it may be because there are so many eager claimants to a share in the spoils that no one of them ever quite breaks through into star focus. (Eartha Kitt did just that the last time around). And I suspect, further, that the sketches and lyrics just aren't firm enough to anchor all this good will snugly in harbor. A few of the parodies aren't sure what they're parodying; all of them start swimmingly and then subside. David Thimar's staging for the musical numbers is always sleek and swift; but a good many of the numbers are just titles ambling around in search of an applause finish.

As a quick survey of the latest Broadway crop, "New Faces of 1956" is encouraging. It's the old hands behind the typewriters that keep pulling the rug out from under—just a little too often for comfort.

New York Post

June 15, 1956

By Frances Herridge

'Faces' in Need of Some New Writing

Leonard Sillman opened his "New Faces of '56" last night at the Ethel Barrymore—his sixth collection of "talent you haven't seen before." My guess is that you won't see many of them again.

But that may be unfair to some nice boys and girls whose principal drawback is the material they have to work with. For there is nothing very original or funny or memorable in this latest revue—nothing that approaches the high spots of "Shoe-string Revue," "Phoenix '55" or, indeed, "New Faces of '52."

No one expects to find every item in a revue to his liking, but the score should be at least 50 per cent. Last night it was about 20 per cent. The rest was energetic, almost frantic, but on a juvenile level.

The biggest catch in Sillman's collection is a bald-headed man named T. C. Jones, who has a flair for impersonating deep-voiced actresses, especially Tallulah Bankhead. With a blond wig falling over one eye, a whisky voice and a cynical slouch, he is a genial Tallulah, introducing whatever number has to be introduced. And he is usually much funnier than the number itself.

The exception is one hilarious

take-off of the "Ziegfeld Follies"—choose your year—where the showgirls are worried by falling headresses and are all but inundated by their ornamentation. Another amusing spoof is Jones again as Hope Diamond, having trouble pitching her voice as she sings to her young men. (The real Hope—Hampton that is—incidentally, was in the first row.

Most effective of the romantic songs is "La Ronde." You might call it a musical adaptation of the play by the same name, where each member of a quartet desires some one who in turn wants someone else. It is nicely sung by Johnny Haymer, Bob Shaver and two lovely blonds—Inga Swenson and Virginia Martin.

Miss Swenson tries for something imaginative in "A Doll's House," as the lonely child "with hands too large for her age," but it doesn't quite succeed. Miss Martin does better in her shrill explanation of Marilyn Monroe's success.

Among the other new faces that most often stand out are the exotic Amru Sani, who replace Eartha Kitt of the '52 version; Jane Connell, who is obviously more comic than her sketches; the versatile Maggie Smith, especially wry in "Darts"; Franca Baldwin, whose taut dancing lends atmosphere to the Calypso tale; Johnny Laverty with his engaging teenage look; and an odd pair of characters, Bill McCutcheon and Billie Hayes, who could be used with more striking effect.

There was, as usual, no lack of good will and energy on the part of the cast. Just a lack of inspiration on the part of the writers—of which there are so many there isn't space here to list them all. Credit Marshall Barer and June Carroll with the best lyrics.

Peter Larkin's settings are simple and attractive, as are the costumes by Thomas Becher.

"Shangri-La"

Daily Mirror

June 14, 1956

Robert Coleman's THEATRE:

'Shangri-La' Has Limited Horizon

• Pictorially magnificent, with gifted cast, it is more impressive to eye than ear.

Some years ago James Hilton wrote a charming novel called "Lost Horizon." Later, came a wonderful film version of it. Between these media, a place called Shangri-La became so popular that the name entered our language as a descriptive term for Utopia, where life is pleasant, leisurely and civilized.

Now Jerome Lawrence and Robert E. Lee, with an assist from author Hilton, have fashioned a musical about this enchanting spot. Titled "Shangri-La," it opened at the Winter Garden Wednesday evening to thunderous applause. It was obvious that most of our neighbors were captivated by the new arrival, though we were not.

PRODUCERS ROBERT FRYER and Lawrence Carr have used the musical play as a springboard for the creation of modern marvels. Peter Larkin has designed unbelievably stunning and ingenious sets, and Irene Sharaff sumptuous costumes. Donald

Saddler has choreographed electrifying ensembles, ranging from jitterbug to Tibetan folk movements.

Fryer and Carr have also assembled a star-studded cast. We shudder to think what their payroll must be. There are Dennis King, Shirley Yamaguchi, Martyn Green, Harold Lang, Jack Cassidy, Joan Holloway, Berry Kroeger and Alice Ghostley to capture every conceivable mood. And there are ever so many other gifted people in the company.

Harry Warren, top-flight ASCAPer, has equipped the super-spectacle with a score. It follows evocatively the action,

though, on first hearing, it offers few, if any, memorable chansons for the morning shower, the juke box or the disk jockeys. And that's one of the troubles with "Shangri-La."

HERE IS A pictorially magnificent production, distinguished by some of our most expert and beguiling personalities, that is more impressive to the eye than to the ear. You will remember what it looked like long after you've forgotten what it was about. Unless you've read the book or seen the movie.

This is one of the most difficult reviews we've had to type all season. For there is so much of merit in this warm-weather entry that it is hard to fathom why, starting with such fine materials and talents, it fails to stimulate the mind or touch the heart.

Perhaps it is because Lawrence and Lee have attempted to treat the Hilton gem cerebrally rather than emotionally. It is as though they were using the methods that were so successful in interpreting the Scopes trial, via "Inherit the Wind," to catch the mystical implications of "Lost Horizon."

TRUE, THEY HAVE GONE so far afield from the original as to have Dennis King—as the wise, though unappreciated, British civil servant—caught by an obtuse Red Chinese official, thereby contrasting the horrors of a current philosophy with the beauties of ageless thought and compassion.

"SHANGRI-LA"

Musical play based on James Hilton's novel "Lost Horizon", book and lyrics by Mr. Hilton, Jerome Lawrence and Robert E. Lee, with music by Harry Warren; scenery by Peter Larkin; costumes by Irene Sharaff; staged by Albert Marre; choreography by Donald Saddler; presented by Robert Fryer and Lawrence Carr at the Winter Garden Theatre, June 13, 1956. The cast: Hugh Conway.....Dennis King
Chao-Li.....Kale Deel
Robert Henderson...Harold Lang
Rita Henderson...Joan Holloway
Charles Mallinson...Jack Cassidy
Miss Brinklow...Alice Ghostley
Chang.....Martyn Green
Arana.....Carol Lawrence
Ti.....Edwin Kim Ying
The Little One...Leland Mayforth
Lo-Tsen.....Shirley Yamaguchi
Rimishi.....Ed Kenney
High Lama.....Berry Kroeger
The Dancer Perrault...Robert Conan
Chief Porter.....George Lenz

"Shangri-La" is an intelligent musical. Though its intelligence is spread a bit thin. In fact, we heard a neighbor observe: "It's essentially a lengthy, exotic ballet, with tidbits of satire and comment." It really is a feast for the eyes. But it's no Shangri-La. No popular entertainment Utopia.

"Shangri-La"—continued

DAILY NEWS

June 14, 1956

'Shangri-La' Elaborately Lovely And Elaborately Lacking Charm

By JOHN CHAPMAN

The late James Hilton's novel, "Lost Horizon," was a charming and imaginative piece of work. Most of the people in charge of converting this fantasy into a musical called "Shangri-La," which opened last evening at the Winter Garden, have gone to extraordinary lengths to de-imagine it.

Except for the sorcery of Peter Larkin's lovely settings, "Shangri-La" is earthbound. Instead of transporting an audience to an idyllic Never Never Land in Tibet, it dumps the audience on a hot curbstone in Tin Pan Alley. It is difficult for me to

make an offhand decision as to which is the more ordinary—the music by Harry Warren or the lyrics by Jerome Lawrence and Robert E. Lee.

Lots of Talent

The story of "Shangri-La" con-

cerns five plane passengers who are forced down on an icy Himalayan slope and are led to a miraculous land of youth and good manners, where nobody grows old. After a while they don't want to go home. But I wanted to last night, along about the middle of the first act.

Since "Shangri-La" is an elaborate production, I suppose I should mourn the waste of a vast amount of money. Instead, I regret the waste of a great amount of talent. There is Martyn Green, playing as suave a mysterious

host as George Arliss played in "The Green Goddess," but with nothing much to do but act polite and sing one passable patter song. They don't even let him dance.

There is Dennis King, portraying the narrator of the expedition, with little to do but look thoughtful and listen to himself on a tape recorder. There are Harold Lang and Joan Holloway, good whirling dancers, who are the only ones able to get their feet off the ground—except designer Larkin, of course. One also finds Alice Ghostley, a good comedienne, but her material is rather ghastly. There is one dance, staged by Donald Saddler, which is inventive and charming; it is an ingenious affair using the principle of the pole vault.

Despite last evening's heat, and despite the show's visual splendors, "Shangri-La" left me as cold as a penguin's toes.

Journal American

June 14, 1956

Musical Has Magic Touch

Breath-Taking Play Overcomes Jinxes to Open at Winter Garden

By JOHN McCLAIN

FOR A SHOW DEALING with a delightful Never-Never Land, "Shangri-La" has had something less than a Utopian history: Several important members of the cast left after the opening in Boston; the director was replaced, and the authors finally stopped the proceedings and did almost an entire re-write.

Yesterday afternoon, just before its Winter Garden opening, a scenic mountain weighing something in the neighborhood of a ton fell over backstage. But Robert Fryer and Lawrence Carr, the producers, were not to be denied at that late date—and last night the curtain rose on schedule.

It rose on a breath-taking production, with Peter Larkin settings and effects that are colossally brilliant, dazzling and imaginative costumes by Irene Sharaff, and a Harry Warren score superbly arranged and executed by Herman Engel.

It's Richly Cast

It has its share of humor, exciting ballet and special

dance numbers, and it is richly cast with Dennis King suave and sincere in the leading role.

So what ain't it got? It ain't got book. The story, adapted by Jerome Lawrence and Robert E. Lee from James Hilton's "Lost Horizon," may be too tenuous and elusive to form the basis for this kind of big musical. It offers a wonderful background, and there is common appeal in the idea of a place beyond the mountains where every prospect pleases and not even man is vile.

But in order to project the plot—at least the way these authors have chosen to do it—the mass momentum of the play has to be halted at intervals, and at such times the going is plain dreary.

Such an incident occurs at the conclusion of the first act. The hero is led into the august presence of the Chief Lama, a geezer of about 150 years, and everything stops while philosophy and pattern of life in Shangri-La is given an exhaustive airing. It seems to me there could have been a more impressive way to play a much shorter scene.

When the show is running at its best it is often magical. Shirley Yamaguchi, the Japanese import making her Broadway bow, is a marvel-

ously plaintive and appealing young woman with a small, true voice and delicate beauty.

There are several numbers with popular overtones sung and danced brilliantly by Harold Lang and Joan Holloway. Jack Cassidy has a pleasant voice and an ingratiating manner, and he scores in duets with Miss Yamaguchi and a ballad on his own.

Then there is the incompensable Martyn Green, fine in his acting but not given enough numbers, I thought; and there is Alice Ghostley, who has never been better presented. She is perfectly cast, and her material is always first rate.

Harry Warren had a stiff assignment in running up an Anglo-Oriental score to fit the size of the production, but I think he succeeded most of the time. His music for the ballets is appealing and some of his ballads will no doubt become popular.

"Shangri-La" is no "King and I," but it offers many brilliant and bounteous moments, and is always in good taste.

I believe it has a chance—and I certainly hope so. They've had enough trouble.

The New York Times

June 14, 1956

Theatre: 'Shangri-La'

Musical Based on Book
by Hilton Opens

By BROOKS ATKINSON

IN "Shangri-La," which opened at the Winter Garden last evening, Broadway has given everything it has in an effort to escape this too solid earth.

What Broadway has is actors, musicians, scene and costume designers and showmen. What Broadway has not provided in the present instance is a poet. But it would take either a poet or a composer to

lead the characters of "Shangri-La" away from Broadway to James Hilton's ideal world where people discover their souls and contemplate eternity. "Shangri-La" is a morality story swamped in production and routines.

With one exception: Shirley Yamaguchi, summoned from Japan a few weeks ago to fill an emergency, has a sense of style that gives her scenes validity. A trained actress from the Orient (she was born in China), Miss Yamaguchi has the flowing rhythms, the delicacy of manner and the

artistic disciplines that bring "Shangri-La" alive. She also has a full, perfectly pitched voice that makes her songs beautiful. In the midst of a literal production, Miss Yamaguchi invests "Shangri-La" with spirit.

Although the other actors also do what comes naturally, neither the writing nor the composing gets them very far from Broadway and Fifth Street. They are Dennis King, an old pro with the gift of making a commonplace line sound sardonic; Martyn Green the Savoyard, now folding his hands in the holy attitudes of a lama; Harold Lang and Joan Holloway, sophisticated dancers; Alice Ghostley, an expert comedian; Jack Cassidy, a romantic singer.

They are worldly performers and know what to do with a song, dance or line of dialog. Eliminate the otherworldly mystique of the Hilton fable, and they would be jolly company.

Give Peter Larkin credit for designing a spectacular show with Himalayan magnificence—the mountains high, the passes perilous, the gardens rich and exotic. Irene Sharaff has dressed the people of Shangri-La with grandeur and also spotlessness. Shangri-La must be fully staffed with efficient dry cleaners.

From the Broadway point of view, everything about the show is upper-class. The orchestra is big and able. Standing at the conductor's desk, Lehman Engel shoots his cuffs at the orchestra with a professional alertness and draws exotic sounds out of the percussion equipment. Under the direction of Donald Saddler some energetic New York dancers are continually interpreting the mysterious East with mincing steps and symbolic flourishes.

But where is Shangri-La, the land of wisdom, spirit and beauty? It is definitely not at the Winter Garden, Broadway has seen to that.

NEW YORK
Herald Tribune

June 14, 1956

THEATER

'Shangri-La'

By WALTER F. KERR

IF YOU'D been having a bad time of it in our modern civilization and you were suddenly dumped down into an exceedingly peaceful valley filled with attractive girls, quite a few art treasures, and no immediate prospect of either death or taxation, what would you do? I imagine you'd yawn, stretch, relax, get your feet off the ground, and gently twiddle your thumbs. Well, that's what everybody in "Shangri-La" did Wednesday night, and it's rather deadly.

With all the rich and obvious local color of James Hilton's "Lost Horizon" at their disposal, didn't librettists Jerome Lawrence and Robert E. Lee realize that they were also faced with a problem? Shangri-La is a valley of serenity, of course, and serenity, peace, wisdom and contemplation are all wonderful words. They may even be wonderful living-conditions, for all I know. But they are not, let's

say, exactly filled with ginger. They don't fizz, or anything.

Yet the Messrs. Lawrence and Lee have simply counted on our admiration, and forgotten all about our fun. They have landed a non-singing Dennis King, a singing Jack Cassidy, a mousy Alice Ghostley, and a bored dance team composed of Harold Lang and Joan Holloway somewhere in that familiar mountain fastness. (The shadowy splinters of their cracked-up plane, by the way, are brilliantly outlined by designer Peter Larkin).

There is a prolonged dance ritual by way of welcome, while the strangers stand by on a bridge and feign interest. The dancers no sooner are shown to their quarters than they hit the sack. For approximately an hour and a quarter Dennis King takes a guided tour of the monastery, moving at a modest stroll and with his hands tucked genially in his pockets. Although the exceedingly pretty Shirley Yamaguchi puts in an appearance, the love story is developed

with astonishing discretion, not to say lassitude. Shangri-lassitude, I guess. And for a first act finale, Mr. Kings sits at the feet of a sedentary and soft-spoken High Lama, the while the ancient fellow chants the history of the place, occasional dancers wave floating pieces of cloth about his revered head, and the orchestra sweeps slumbrously on.

It's all pretty much like that. I'm afraid. Oh, a breeze sneaks through a chink in the mountains now and then. It first stirs things up when Miss Holloway, hauling herself off that Oriental bed, takes a few short steps, notices a lift in the air, and suddenly discovers that—at this altitude—she can do all the fancy steps she thought she'd grown too old for. Mr. Lang promptly joins her in the number (it's called "Every Time You Danced With Me") and it turns out to be a comparative, and very welcome, whirlwind. The two do almost as well by a bit of jazz hoofing ("Talkin' With Your Feet") that is clearly meant to wake up the second act.

And a kind word for Alice Ghostley. Miss Ghostley is playing a bespectacled do-gooder who likes to hand out inspirational tracts ("I'm always anxious about the souls of people who seem to be enjoying them-

selves") and when it is time for her to begin enjoying herself, she has quite a few odd, intense little sideglances—and even a few unpredictable high-kicks—to help her lyrics along. "I'm Just a Little Bit Confused" and "What Every Old Girl Should Know" are the items Miss Ghostley is called upon to rescue, and she is a real St. Bernard in the circumstances.

As a kindly mentor who has been living at Shangri-La for quite a long time, the normally exhilarating Martyn Green is suave, benign, and utterly wasted. Jack Cassidy's robust voice is put to reasonably good use on the ballads "The World Outside" and "Somewhere," but Harry Warren's melodies constantly seem to be struggling to find a springboard: the show just never gives them a chance to take off. Donald Saddler's ensemble dances seem to lean on props—long bamboo poles, ropes from overhead, gauzy veils—and a fairly ambitious "Dance of Time" breaks down into routine pantomime.

"I had the strangest feeling," remarks Dennis King shortly after his arrival, "that the world had stopped turning on its axis." And so, as the evening wore on, did I.

"Shangri-La"—continued

New York Post

June 14, 1956

By Frances Herridge

'Shangri-La' Fails to Find Its Utopia

The dream of serenity that is "Shangri-La" arrived at the Winter Garden last night after as turbulent a road trip as any musical this season. One wonders why this musical adaptation of James Hilton's "Lost Horizon" seemed worth all the effort.

Producers Robert Fryer and Lawrence Carr worked like demons to get the book rewritten, new songs and dances added, two leads and the director replaced. But they were faced with an even more difficult task, which they never resolved—that of making a Broadway musical out of a quiet, philosophical novel.

The two elements remain stubbornly opposed in spite of admirable attempts to fuse them. Oddly enough, the show is gayest and lightest and wittiest when it is being philosophical—when the

American way is being compared with Shangri-La. It becomes a beautifully dressed bore when it resorts to dance and its big production numbers.

Authors Jerome Lawrence and Robert E. Lee have followed the story outlines faithfully enough. Dennis King as Hugh Conway, a writer of thoughtful but unsuccessful books, has been brought to the Tibetan hideaway with a small plane load of misfits—a couple of disillusioned hoofers, a restless road engineer and a prissy missionary lass. The High

Lama, now over 200, wants Conway to take over his true center of civilization, where no one strives for success and where people enjoy everything in moderation, even chastity. All but the engineer are glad to stay.

Alice Ghostley is a delight as the spreader of the gospel, who "can always tell a heathen by the smile on his face." And the funniest song in the show is her "I'm Just a Little Bit Confused." The second funniest is her song with Martyn Green—"What Every Old Girl Should Know."

Green comes off next best as the amused and quizzical Chang. He even gets a chance at a rapid patter song in his famed Gilbert and Sullivan style.

Dennis King is always a pleasure to have on stage, with his dry, clipped witticisms; but he does seem uncomfortable in the serious moments, particularly in his final song to "Shangri-La."

Shirley Yamaguchi, making her American stage debut, is fragile as porcelain and most decorative without being exciting. She sings beautifully "The Man I Never

Met." But one of the dull spots is her "Dance of Time," not because of any lack of grace on her part but for lack of choreographic imagination. It seems more a delay than a revelation.

The same is true in the scene with the High Lama, a thankless part played by Berry Kroeger. His long story is illustrated by a fairly humdrum dance that adds only length, not meaning. Whatever lofty message the High Lama has is lost in the shuffle.

Choreographer Donald Saddler's "Dance of Welcome" is far happier, as are his duets for Harold Lang and Joan Holloway. These two do a fine job as the American hoofers, and with a pleasant song called "Second Time in Love."

Jack Cassidy, the engineer, does the best he can with very little material.

Harry Warren's music for the most part is neither distinguished nor infectious. Designer Peter Larkin has a lot of impressive mountains and balconies, but you wonder if they are all needed.



New York World-Telegram

and
The Sun

June 14, 1956

'Shangri-La' Opens At Winter Garden

By WILLIAM HAWKINS.

"Shangri-La," that wonderful story of escapism, comes back to us now with music. At the Winter Garden, it turns out to be a most extraordinarily agreeable evening.

This hypnotic tale of a land where time stands still is even more welcome and more applicable, in the modern troubled world, than it was when written.

It is reassuring and joyful to think there could be a place where all man's finest accomplishments are vaulted up against destruction, and where people never hurry.

Lovely Calm.

The show, in its exotic way, captures this quite lovely sense of calm. In the audience, you never feel anyone is hammering at you or forcing anything on you.

The physical production is spectacular, wild with mountains and precarious bridges. The color is daring, Oriental and rich with surprises.

Against this vivid, majestic background, the story unfolds in an almost naive manner. From a wrecked plane, a small group of Occidentals is escorted to the Mystic Eden of Shangri-La.

Homing Urge Fades.

They find that the urge to

return home, for most of them, soon fades. Here they are calm, happy and useful. The ones who try to leave meet disaster. The central figure, Conway, whose designation as new head of Shangri-La has occasioned the arrival of all of them there, goes back by a trick played on his Red Chinese captors.

Dennis King plays Conway with an impressive sense of weary, hopeful calm. Co-starred with him is Shirley Yamaguchi, who is surely the most exquisite figure to arrive on Broadway in years.

The fragile, lovely little Japanese actress conveys the most immense emotions through her delicate mime. Her voice, for both speaking and singing, has a suggestion of pipes played by the wind. Her beautiful hands and lovely slight body are used to fine effect.

Memorable Numbers.

Of the other guests, Alice Ghostley is outstanding as an American missionary who suddenly finds in Shangri-La that there is no crime or sin in enjoying one's self. Miss Ghostley's precise delivery

and clear projection makes her numbers memorable.

A pair of USO dancers are played in a sprightly manner by Harold Lang and Joan Holloway. They add much gaiety to the show with their sudden rejuvenation of spirits and talent; then even more with a bright number in which they teach jazz figures to the natives.

Jack Cassidy makes a handsome singing engineer, who insists on leaving and takes Miss Yamaguchi with him to death.

Quiet Authority.

Martyn Green has great quiet authority as a junior lama, peaking his performance with a gay song about racing beetles.

A long narrative, backed by striking ballet, is effectively delivered by Barry Kroeger as the retiring ancient head of Shangri-La.

It is a curious and unusual evening, this "Shangri-La." Physically vivid, original in movement, it constantly breaks traditions, yet ends up as mystically compelling as the original story, and as ever so welcome in its imaginative hopefulness.

"The Littlest Revue"



New York World-Telegram

and
The Sun

May 23, 1956

'Littlest Revue' Opens at Phoenix

By WILLIAM HAWKINS.

"The Littlest Revue" which opened at the Phoenix Theatre last night, lives up to its name in a manner which none of its participants could possibly have anticipated.

It is short, very short, on gaiety, looks and humor. Most of the tunes have the slightly listless air of having been rejected from other scores. Whatever the reason, their pleasure in being sung is worn out.

The sketches have not been

carried beyond the point where they sound like good ideas, proposed in a drawing room for revue sketches, some day.

High-Caliber Cast.

In desperation, several of the sketches wind up with tasteless efforts to shock, in weak substitution for wit.

All this has the unfortunate effect of presenting the players, who are most of them proven of higher caliber, in a most uncomplimentary light.

It seems both safer and

fairer to judge the known members of the cast on past performances. Charlotte Rae, Larry Storch, Dorothy Jarnac, Tommy Morton and Beverlee Bozeman have all made respectable reputations for themselves in the past, in clubs or the theater.

Tammy Grimes has a reputation in the profession, which is hard to judge here, except for her affecting phrases of the song "Madly in Love."

Joel Grey is a warm personality, who sings and dances well enough to back up his comedy ideas. George Marcy also puts himself on record as songster and hooper.

Better Luck in 2nd Act.

The only numbers which make any clear impression come along in the second act.

Miss Rae has a good hearty take off of the opera star deigning to grace the night club. She later sings very simply a sweet song called "Summer Is Icumen In."

And Dorothy Jarnac impresses with a dance effect resembling a nightmare of

"THE LITTLEST REVUE"

Conceived, cast and assembled by Ben Bagley; lyrics and music mostly by Ogden Nash and Vernon Duke, additional music and lyrics by John Latouche, Sheldon Harnick, Lee Adams, Charles Strouse, John Strauss, Sidney Shaw and Michael Brown; sketches by Nat Hiken and Billy Friedberg, Eudora Welty, Mike Stewart, George Baxt, Robert Emmett, Bud McCreery, Allan Mannings and Bob Van Scoyk; staged by Paul Lammers; choreography by Charles Weidman; settings and lighting by Klaus Holm; costumes by Alvin Colt; presented by T. Edward Hambleton and Norris Houghton by arrangement with Mr. Bagley at the Phoenix Theatre, May 22, 1956. The cast includes: Beverley Bozeman, Joel Grey, Tammy Grimes, Dorothy Jarnac, George Marcy, Tommy Morton, Charlotte Rae and Larry Storch.

hands.

This is not much pickings, and it is a heavy-footed evening.

DAILY NEWS

May 23, 1956

'The Littlest Revue' Fine in Spots, But It Would Be Better Littler

By JOHN CHAPMAN

I've read in the papers that there is more than somewhat of measles in town lately. It may be that "The Littlest Revue," a youthful show at the Phoenix Theatre, has them, or it. At last evening's premiere, anyhow, it came out in spots.

Many of these spots are undeniably charming or funny or witty. The company consists of four boys and four girls who have great enthusiasm and a surprising variety of theatrical skills. It is their task to present 29 numbers written by 13 composers, lyricists and sketchists, and they go at the job with wonderfully light hearts. But in the end the 18 writers have overcome the octet. About half of the show could be thrown away.

The revue begins brightly with a number which is a satire on the

kind of money-raising audition which now is common in show financing. It continues with Joel Grey spoofing Harry Belafonte in a song which begins, "I was born in the Bronx," with that Belfonte squawk emphasizing "Bronx."

A Very Funny Girl

It moves right into another satire, an excellent one, on the off-Broadway theatre and the strange places in which it is found, and then it offers Charlotte Rae, a very funny girl, in a number called "The Shape of Things."

After this, last evening, my attention began to wander from the stage, and I noticed that the drummer in the orchestra was the spit and image of Estes Kefauver. This cheered me up, so whenever something awful like a song called "Madly in Love" turned up, I'd watch the drummer.

On looking over my program, I find that I was watching this fellow quite a lot, for many of the sketches in "The Littlest Revue" are merely ideas which must have seemed good at the time. A happy exception is the one blackout in the show. I thought blackouts died with two-day vaudeville, but down at the Phoenix they have one that's a beauty—and I won't spoil it by telling what it is about.

Sketch by Welty

Now and again things do perk up, and one of the most charming of the sketches—written by Eudora Welty—is a kind of Mary Petty drawing come to life. It concerns the demolition of the Hotel Brevoort, and its humor reminds me of a wonderful old "Little Show" sketch, "The Still Alarm."

Of the eight performers, I'd say Miss Rae succeeds best. She is a clown of the first order, and she can play a vintage dowager or a sex-mad secretary with equal skill. Also impressive is Dorothy Jarnac in an eerie, Dali-esque dance number called "Opus 9." The music for this, by Edward Sauter, is arresting and original.

The five other players are Beverley Bozeman, Tammy Grimes, George Marcy, Tommy Morton and Larry Storch. The principal songwriters are Ogden Nash and Vernon Duke, who have their ups and downs. There are nice sets and costumes by Klaus Holm and Alvin Colt. The director, Paul Lammers, keeps the show moving briskly, and it isn't his fault if "The Littlest Revue" seems to move so slowly during its second half.

"The Littlest Revue"—continued

Daily Mirror

May 23, 1956

Robert Coleman's THEATRE:

'Littlest Revue' Full Of Great Big Laughs

• Ben Bagley has rounded up a cast of gifted, versatile, young artists at the Phoenix.

With Spring in full swing, Ben Bagley thought it was about time to give the town a sprightly topical revue. Having made something of a splash with "The Shoestring Revue," the enterprising impresario has come up with "The Littlest Revue" at the Phoenix Theatre.

The new arrival gets its title because it has a cast of only eight, but they are gifted, versatile and attractive young performers. They double in skits,

songs and dances. They lend the illusion of numbering many more. In alphabetical order, they are Beverly Bozeman, Joel Grey, Tammy Grimes, Dorothy Jarnac, George Marcy, Tommy Morton, Charlotte Rae and Larry Storch.

THE PRINCIPALS are all so excellent that it would be ungracious to single any of them out for special kudos. But the bistro set will doubtless remember Storch as the ex-baseball player who became a clever floor-show comic. Miss Rae, another stand-out, has had a couple of Broadway whirls.

Grey, son of the papa of "Borscht Capades," has become a top-flight nitery and two-day entertainer. Miss Grimes is a smart gal who's willing to hide her good looks in the interest of fun. The misses Jarnac and Bozeman, Morton and Marcy can sing and step with the best, and garner a chuckle on the side. There's a lot of talent in that line-up.

Bagley is a persuasive producer. He's talked such high-priced tunesmiths and humorists as Ogden Nash, Vernon Duke, John Latouche, Sheldon Harnick, Lee Adams, Charles Strouse, Sidney Shaw, Sammy Cahn, Michael Brown, Nat

Hiken, Billy Friedberg, Eudora Welty, Mike Stewart, George Baxt, Bud McCreary, Allan Manings and Bob Van Scoyk into contributing the words and music.

They have kidded everything from the off-Broadway theatre vogue to the craze for the power of thought, from victims of the space-ship era to New York's mania for tearing down landmarks. The songs are pleasant, and some of the skits hilarious. The dances are lively, and the mood most ingratiating.

PAUL LAMMERS HAS staged the proceedings at a brisk pace. Charles Weidman has devised the choreography. Klaus Holm and Alvin Colt have supplied simple but appropriate sets and costumes.

"The Littlest Revue" winds up a rewarding season at the Phoenix.

For an enjoyable evening, we recommend dinner at Luchow's and "The Littlest Revue" at the nearby Phoenix.

Journal American

May 23, 1956

Musical Has Its Moments

Production Opening at Phoenix Won't Mar Record of Late Years

By JOHN McCLAIN

WE ARE ALL AWARE by now that it is terribly tricky business to produce a revue. There hasn't been a truly first class one in several seasons and "The Littlest Revue," which opened at the Phoenix Theatre last night, will not mar the record.

The present trend in fashioning these musicals takes one of two trends. Either you decide to go for broke, buy the most lavish scenery and the biggest names, or you hope to squeak through with fresh

faces, a few flats, and pray to get by on a basis of youthful enthusiasm, verve, ingenuity and possibly talent.

An example of the former, the lamented "Ziegfeld Follies" recently laid \$400,000

bomb in Philadelphia and folded. "The Littlest Revue" will cause no such expensive detonation, but it really isn't very good, either.

Big Mistake

It seems to me these so-called "intimate" producers make a whopping mistake when they have their opening number involve some sort of apology to the audience. In this case they come out and tell you that they're really unpretentious people and they haven't much money and they sort of hope you'll go along with them, although they don't seem to know quite why.

As the evening progressed many members of the audience couldn't figure it out either. There is the usual steam and exuberance, but the material is spotty. There are sketches with promising ideas which dwindle into inanity, there are others that never get off the ground.

Occasional songs by Vernon and Duke and Ogden Nash seem appealing, others have a strong suggestion of having been dug out of a long-forgotten trunk.

The cast is obviously not

without accomplishment. Charlotte Rae is an amiable comedienne who is occasionally very funny and might be hilarious with a happier part; Joel Grey is a bright and prepossessing beginner, but again his stuff is often sorry.

A Work-Horse

Larry Storch is a good revue work-horse, a guy that can handle accents and change clothes in a hurry, only many times there seemed little excuse for the rush.

Beverly Bozeman is a decorative dancer, and Dorothy Jarnac has one quite original ballet number called "Opus 9"; George Marcy, Tammy Grimes and Tommy Morton serve as energetic song-dance-sketch accomplices.

There is not, oddly, an exceptional singer or dancer in the group.

One always hopes that in these days of excessive costs somebody will come along with a big little idea that becomes a grand slam homer.

Unfortunately, this is not it.

New York Post

May 23, 1956

By Richard Watts Jr.

An Intimate Revue at the Phoenix

It is the custom of the energetic Phoenix Theater to close each of its seasons with a musical show, preferably of the intimate sort, and last night it continued the practice by offering an informal entertainment outspokenly entitled "The Littlest Revue." Organized by Ben Bagley, whose "Shoestring Revue" is pleasantly remembered by many of us, and written by more people than there are members of the cast, it turned out to be a friendly and agreeable collection of songs, dances and sketches, but I can't say that it struck me as exactly exciting.

There is a cast of eight, and I think the performers are its brightest feature. For example, Charlotte Rae proves to be a fresh and original comedienne, who can sing with mock gravity a pseudo madrigal and make it a slyly humorous delight. There is also a likable young newcomer named

Joel Grey, who can handle a monologue, a song or a role in a sketch and be excellent in all of them. Matters are helped, too, by such talented dancers as Beverley Bozeman and Dorothy Jarnac, as well as by the comic acting skill of Larry Storch, and, indeed, the entire company is helpful.

Some Numbers

A list of the numbers that pleased me most last night would include, first of all, two of Miss Rae's songs called "The Shape of Things" and "Summer Is Icumen In," in addition to her appearance

as a harried Wagnerian singer entangled in a Las Vegas night club act, and certainly a gay and charming number known as "Game of Dance," done most attractively by Miss Bozeman, George Marcy and Tommy Morton to Danny Daniels' choreography. I also liked a song by Ogden Nash and Vernon Duke known as "Far From Wonderful," as sung by Mr. Grey and danced by Miss Jarnac.

As you would expect in an intimate revue, there are sketches making friendly topical mockery of the off-Broadway theaters in general and the Phoenix in particular, and, of course, the earnest technique of the Actors Studio comes in for the required amount of kidding. There is considerable fun in connection with these items, but it is well known that sketch writers face grave difficulties in finding satisfactory tag lines to bring the sketches to an effective conclusion, and I didn't think the current revue authors escaped this occupational peril.

Three Sketches

Three of the more ambitious

sketches caused me a certain amount of worry because they contained amusing things but didn't, I thought, quite come off. One of them is by the extremely talented Eudora Welty, and deals with the last day of the Brevoort Hotel in a manner that is perhaps more eerie than comic. Another is Bud McCreary's "The Power of Negative Thinking," which seemed to me a little complicated in whatever it was satirizing. The third is by Nat Hiken and Billy Friedberg, and I found its kidding of the State Department and an amorous Oriental only occasionally funny.

Among the virtues of "The Littlest Revue" is its fresh and attractive physical appearance, and this is a merit not to be ignored. The fact is that the new show's unostentatious good looks, its agreeable performers, the highly commendable talents of Miss Rae and Mr. Grey, the delightful "Game of Dance" number, and the general air of unassuming brightness deserve anyone's attention and approval. It merely seemed to me that the final effect was just a little bit disappointing.

NEW YORK Herald Tribune

May 23, 1956

THEATER

'The Littlest Revue'

By WALTER F. KERR

IN A nice little intimate musical revue, you're always ready to forgive a dancer his singing voice and a singer his few slight, cheerful efforts at dancing. My problem at the Phoenix last night was I didn't know whom to forgive for what.

Here was this amiable-looking fellow strolling out in front of a bright blue curtain and mildly tossing off a few apologetic notes by way of song. For quite a while I grinned back at him (actually, there were several such fellows, but they looked rather alike), because I was confidentially anticipating the whirlwind tap routine that would surely follow. But no tap routine. He finished that song, beamed a bit, and retired. He was a singer. It was pretty much like that all evening.

It has been entrepreneur Ben

Bagley's pleasure to assemble just eight young people and hurl them singly and severally through all of the sketches, solos, trios, and starlit production numbers of a standard revue. It has been Mr. Bagley's mishap to hire the wrong eight people. Not that his recruits aren't reasonable personable: they're just not the powerhouses they'd have to be to take the place of two stars, four featured zanies, and a rousing chorus of twenty.

Mr. Bagley does have one trump card in his skimpy hand. Her name is Charlotte Rae, she has slimmed down miraculously since she last cavorted in these parts, and she has begun to acquire a high comic gloss. She has to let all the stops out every so often—in a misguided satire on "Anastasia," for instance, or in a soggy farce treatment of the

last days of the Hotel Brevoort—just to shore up a tottering comic conceit.

But she can now dress a genuinely possible number with some finesse. She turns the trick in one of those madrigal jobs, rolling her Elizabethan r's and enunciating idiotically broken syllables with a precision and a relish that are all the funnier for their sly reserve. And she is at her very best in a subdued, truly warm rendering of the show's most litting bit of mockery, the Vernon Duke-John Latouche "Summer Is Icumen In."

Tagging a bit behind Miss Rae—well, quite a bit behind—are Tammy Grimes, a firm-jawed girl who cannot keep her blonde hair out of her eyes, and Joel Grey, a night-club entertainer who looks like a miniature Al Jolson but hasn't yet made up his mind just what sort of entertaining he wants to do. He's pretty funny, though, making sounds like Harry Belafonte squealing his way down the wide Mississippi, and I especially admired Miss Grimes as she leered at a successful movie star and menacingly asked "Where is Laura La Plante?"

The evening's other assets are limited. There's an engagingly lazy improvisation called "Game

of Dance" in which George Marcy, Beverley Bozeman and Tommy Morton begin to catch the easygoing spirit of Charles Weldman's choreography. There is a very fast blackout (Vignette," with Larry Storch and Tommy Grimes) that tees off as though it were going to have some fun with "Cat on a Hot Tin Roof" and then foals you nicely. And I guess you could say that a drugstore lament, "Madly in Love," and a window-dressing ballad, "Far From Wonderful" (both by Ogden Nash and Vernon Duke) were a notch above the generally mechanical level of the score.

But most of the tunes disappear into thin air before you can quite catch them, most of the sketches have trouble not only with their last lines but with their first, and the simple visual pleasures of Klaus Holm's blueprint settings and Alvin Colt's costumes can't really make up for the over-all vitamin deficiency.

When a show is as candidly modest as this one about its budget, its personnel, and its intentions, one hates to pick on it. But there's just too little in "The Littlest Revue."